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ABRAHAM COWLEY
A Selection of Poems
Edited by
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LONDON

NOEL DOUGLAS

1927

ABRAHAM COWLEY

[1618—1667]

Most of the poems in this selection are from the volume of Cowley's Poems published in 1656. This contained *Miscellanies*, *The Mistress*, *Pindarique Odes*, *Anacreontiques*, and *Davideis*. *The Mistress* had been published separately in 1647. The *Essays* are from the edition of *Cowley's Works* first published, after his death, in 1668. *Piramus and Thisbe* [written at the age of ten] is from Cowley's first work, *Poetical Blossoms* [1633], and the poems from *Sylva* are from the volume first published in 1636. Cowley's spelling has been retained throughout. The best modern edition of Cowley is that of A. R. Waller [Cambridge English Classics, 1905–6].

G. D. H. C.
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FROM “ MISCELLANIES ”

The Motto

TENTANDA VIA EST, &c.

What shall I do to be for ever known,
And make the Age to come my own ?
I shall like Beasts or Common People dy,
Unless you write my Elegy ;
Whilst others great by being born are grown,
Their Mothers Labour, not their own.
In this scale Gold, in th’ other Fame does ly,
The weight of that mounts this so high.
These men are Fortunes Jewels, moulded
bright ;
Brought forth with their own fire and light.
If I, her vulgar stone for either look ;
Out of my self it must be strook.
Yet I must on ; what sound is’t strikes mine
ear ?
Sure I Fames Trumpet hear.
It sounds like the last Trumpet ; for it can
Raise up the bur’ied Man.
Unpast Alpes stop me, but I’ll cut through all,
And march, the Muses Hannibal.
Hence all the flattering vanities that lay
Nets of Roses in the way.

Hence the desire of Honours, or Estate ;
And all, that is not above Fate.
Hence Love himself, that Tyrant of my days,
Which intercepts my coming praise.
Come my best friends, my Books, and lead me
on ;
'Tis time that I were gon.
Welcome great Stagirite, and teach me now
All I was born to know.
Thy Scholars vict'ries thou dost far out-do ;
He conquer'd th' Earth, the whole World
you.
Welcome learn'd Cicero, whose blest Tongue
and Wit
Preserves Romes Greatness yet.
Thou art the first of Ora'tors ; only he
Who best can praise Thee, next must be.
Welcome the Mantu'an Swan, Virgil the Wise,
Whose Verse walks highest, but not flies.
Who brought green Poesie to her perfect Age ;
And made that Art which was a Rage.
Tell me, ye mighty Three, what shall I do
To be like one of you.
But you have climb'd the Mountains top,
there sit
On the calm flouri'shing head of it,
And whilst with wearied steps we upward go,
See Us, and Clouds below.

The Chronicle

A BALLAD

1

Margarita first possest,
If I remember well, my brest,
Margarita first of all ;
But when a while the wanton Maid
With my restless Heart had plaid,
Martha took the flying Ball.

2

Martha soon did it resign
To the beauteous Catherine.
Beauteous Catherine gave place
(Though loth and angry she to part
With the possession of my heart)
To Elisa's conqu'ering face.

3

Elisa till this Hour might reign
Had she not Evil Counsels ta'ne,
Fundamental Laws she broke,
And still new Favorites she chose,
Till up in Arms my Passions rose,
And cast away her yoke.

4

Mary then and gentle Ann
Both to reign at once began.
Alternately they sway'd,
And sometimes Mary was the Fair,
And sometimes Ann the Crown did wear,
And sometimes Both I' obey'd.

5

Another Mary then arose,
And did rigorous Laws impose.
A mighty Tyrant she !
Long, alas, should I have been
Under that Iron-Scepter'd Queen,
Had not Rebecca set me free.

6

When fair Rebecca set me free,
'Twas then a golden Time with me.
But soon those pleasures fled,
For the gracious Princess dy'd
In her Youth and Beauties pride,
And Judith reigned in her sted.

7

One Month, three Days, and half an hour
Judith held the Sov'eraign Power.
Wondrous beautiful her Face,
But so weak and small her Wit,
That she to govern was unfit,
And so Susanna took her place.

8

But when Isabella came
Arm'd with a resistless flame
And th' Artillery of her Eye,
Whilst she proudly marcht about
Greater Conquests to find out,
She beat out Susan by the By.

But in her place I then obey'd
 Black-ey'd Bess, her Viceroy-Maid,
 To whom ensu'd a Vacancy.
 Thousand worse Passions then possest
 The Interregnum of my brest.
 Bless me from such an Anarchy !

Gentle Henriette than
 And a third Mary next began,
 Then Jone, and Jane, and Audria.
 And then a pretty Thomasine,
 And then another Katharine,
 And then a long Et cætera.

But should I now to you relate
 The strength and riches of their state,
 The Powder, Patches, and the Pins,
 The Ribbans, Jewels, and the Rings,
 The Lace, the Paint, and warlike things
 That make up all their Magazins :

If I should tell the politick Arts
 To take and keep mens hearts,
 The Letters, Embassies, and Spies,
 The Frowns, and Smiles, and Flatteries,
 The Quarrels, Tears, and Perjuries,
 Numberless, Nameless Mysteries !

And all the Little Lime-twigs laid
 By Matchavil the Waiting-Maid ;
 I more voluminous should grow
 (Chiefly if I like them should tell
 All Change of Weathers that befell)
 Than Holinshead or Stow.

But I will briefer with them be,
 Since few of them were long with Me.
 An higher and a nobler strain
 My present Empress does claim,
 Heleonora, First o'th' Name ;
 Whom God grant long to reign.

On the Death of Mr. Crashaw

Poet and Saint ! to thee alone are given
The two most sacred Names of Earth and
Heav'en.

The hard and rarest Union which can be
Next that of Godhead with Humanitie.
Long did the Muses banisht Slaves abide,
And built vain Pyramids to mortal pride ;
Like Moses Thou (though Spells and Charms
withstand)

Hast brought them nobly home back to their
Holy Land.

Ah wretched we, Poets of Earth ! but
Thou

Wert Living the same Poet which thou'rt Now.
Whilst Angels fling to thee their ayres divine,
And joy in an applause so great as thine.
Equal society with them to hold,
Thou needst not make new Songs, but say the
Old.

And they (kind Spirits !) shall all rejoice to see
How little less than They, Exalted Man may be.

Still the old Heathen Gods in Numbers
dwell,

The Heav'enliest thing on Earth still keeps up
Hell.

Nor have we yet quite purg'd the Christian
Land ;

Still Idols here, like Calves at Bethel stand.
And though Pans Death long since all Or'acles
broke,

Yet still in Rhyme the Fiend Apollo spoke :

Nay with the worst of Heathen dotage We
(Vain men !) the Monster Woman Deifie ;
Find Stars, and tye our Fates there in a Face,
And Paradise in them by whom we lost it,
place.

What different faults corrupt our Muses thus ?
Wanton as Girles, as old Wives, Fabulous !

Thy spotless Muse, like Mary, did contain
The boundless Godhead ; she did well disdain
That her eternal Verse employ'd should be
On a less subject than Eternitie ;
And for a sacred Mistress scorn'd to take,
But her whom God himself scorn'd not his
Spouse to make.

It (in a kind) her Miracle did do ;
A fruitful Mother was, and Virgin too.

How well (blest Swan) did Fate contrive
thy death ;
And made thee render up thy tuneful breath
In thy great Mistress Arms ? thou most divine
And richest Offe'ring of Lorctto's Shrine !
Where like some holy Sacrifice t'expire,
A Fever burns thee, and Love lights the Fire.
Angels (they say) brought the fam'd Chappel
there,

And bore the sacred Load in Triumph though
the air.

'Tis surer much they brought thee there, and
They,

And Thou, their charge, went singing all the
way.

Pardon, my Mother Church, if I consent
That Angels led him when from thee he
went

For even in Error sure no Danger is
When joyn'd with so much Piety as his.
Ah, mighty God, with shame I speak't, and
grief,
Ah that our greatest Faults were in Belief !
And our weak Reason were ev'en weaker yet,
Rather than thus our Wills too strong for it.
His Faith perhaps in some nice Tencents might
Be wrong ; his Life, I'm sure, was in the right.
And I my self a Catholick will be,
So far at least, great Saint, to Pray to thee.
Hail Bard Triumphant ! and some care bestow
On us, the Poëts Militant Below !
Oppos'd by our old En'emy, adverse Chance,
Attacqu'd by Envy, and by Ignorance,
Enchain'd by Beauty, tortur'd by Desires,
Expos'd by Tyrant-Love to savage Beasts and
Fires.

Thou from low earth in nobler Fames didst rise,
And like Elijah, mount alive the Skies.
Elisha-like (but with a wish much less,
More fit thy Greatness, and my Littleness)
Lo here I beg (I whom thou once didst prove
So Humble to Esteem, so Good to Love)
Not that thy Spi'rit might on me Doubled be,
I ask but half thy mighty Spi'rit for Me.
And when my Muse soars with so strong a
Wing,
'Twill learn of things Divine, and first of Thee
to sing.

FROM "ANACREONTIQUES"

Drinking

The thirsty Earth soaks up the Rain,
And drinks, and gapes for drink again.
The Plants suck in the Earth, and are
With constant drinking fresh and fair.
The Sea it self, which one would think
Should have but little need of Drink,
Drinks ten thousand Rivers up,
So fill'd that they o'reflow the Cup.
The busie Sun (and one would guess
By's drunken fiery face no less)
Drinks up the Sea, and when h'as done,
The Moon and Stars drink up the Sun.
They drink and dance by their own light,
They drink and revel all the night.
Nothing in Nature's Sober found,
But an eternal Health goes round.
Fill up the Bowl then, fill it high,
Fill all the Glasses there, for why
Should every creature drink but I,
Why, Men of Morals, tell me why ?

Beauty

Liberal Nature did dispense
To all things Arms for their defence ;
And some she arms with sin'ewy force,
And some with swiftness in the course ;
Some with hard Hoofs, or forked claws,
And some with Horns, or tusked Jaws.

And some with Scales, and some with Wings,
And some with Teeth, and some with Stings.
Wisdom to Man she did afford,
Wisdom for Shield, and Wit for Sword.
What to beauteous Woman-kind,
What Arms, what Armour has she assign'd ?
Beauty is both ; for with the Fair
What Arms, what Armour can compare ?
What Steel, what Gold, or Diamond,
More Impassible is found ?
And yet what Flame, what Lightning e're
So great an Active force did bear ?
They are all weapon, and they dart
Like Porcupines from every part.
Who can, alas, their strength express,
Arm'd, when they themselves undress,
Cap-a-pe with Nakedness ?

The Account

When all the Stars are by thee told,
(The endless Sums of heav'nly Gold)
Or when the Hairs are reckon'd all,
From sickly Autumns Head that fall,
Or when the drops that make the Sea,
Whilst all her Sands thy Counters be ;
Thou then, and Thou alone must prove
Th' Arithmetician of my Love.
An hundred Loves at Athens score,
At Corinth write an hundred more.
Fair Corinth does such Beauties bear,
So few ~~is~~ an Escaping there.

Write then at Chios seventy three ;
Write then at Lesbos (let me see)
Write me at Lesbos ninety down,
Full ninety Loves, and half a One.
And next to these let me present
The fair Ionian Regiment ;
And next the Carian Company,
Five hundred both Effectively.
Three hundred more at Rhodes and Crete ;
Three hundred 'tis I am sure complete.
For arms at Crete each Face does bear,
And every Eye's an Archer there.
Go on ; this stop why dost thou make ?
Thou think'st, perhaps, that I mistake.
Seems this to thee too great a Summe ?
Why many Thousands are to come ;
The mighty Xerxes could not boast
Such different Nations in his Host.
On ; for my love, if thou be'st weary,
Must find some better Secretary.
I have not yet my Persian told,
Nor yet my Syrian Loves enroll'd,
Nor Indian, nor Arabian ;
Nor Cyprian Loves, nor African ;
Nor Scythian, nor Italian flames ;
There's a whole Map behind of Names.
Of gentle Love i'th' temperate Zone,
And cold one's in the Frigid One,
Cold Frozen Loves with which I pine,
And parched Loves beneath the Line.

The Epicure

Fill the Bowl with rosie Wine,
Around our temples Roses twine,
And let us chearfully awhile,
Like the Wine and Roses smile.
Crown'd with Roses we contemn
Gyges wealthy Diadem.
To day is Ours ; what do we fear ?
To day is Ours ; we have it here.
Let's treat it kindly, that it may
Wish at least with us to stay.
Let's banish Business, banish Sorrow ;
To the Gods belongs To morrow.

Another

Underneath this Myrtle shade
On flowry beds supinely laid,
With od'orous Oyls my head o'reflowing,
And around it Roses growing,
What should I do but drink away
The Heat, and troubles of the Day ?
In this more than Kingly state,
Love himself shall on me wait.
Fill to me, Love, nay fill it up ;
And mingled cast into the Cup,
Wit, and Mirth, and noble Fires,
Vigorous Health, and gay Desires.
The Wheel of Life no less will stay
In a smooth than rugged way.
Since it equally doth flee,
Let the Motion pleasant be.

Why do we precious Oyntments shower,
Nobler wines why do we pour,
Beauteous Flowers why do we spread,
Upon the Mon'uments of the Dead ?
Nothing they but Dust can show,
Or Bones that hasten to be so.
Crown me with Roses whilst I Live,
Now your Wines and Oyntments give.
After Death I nothing crave,
Let me Alive my pleasures have,
All are Stoicks in the Grave.

FROM “THE MISTRESS”

The Change

1

Love in her Sunny eyes does basking play ;
Love walks the pleasant Mazes of her Hair ;
Love does on both her Lips for ever stray ;
And sows and reaps a thousand kisses there.
In all her outward parts Love’s alwayes seen ;
But, oh, He never went within.

2

Within Love’s foes, his greatest foes abide,
Malice, Inconstancy, and Pride.
So the Earths face, Trees, Herbs, and Flowers
do dress,
With other beauties numberless :
But at the Center, Darkness is, and Hell ;
There wicked Spirits, and there the Damned
dwell.

3

With me alas, quite contrary it fares ;
Darkness and Death lies in my weeping eyes,
Despair and Paleness in my face appears,
And Grief and Fear, Love’s greatest Enemies ;
But, like the Persian Tyrant, Love within
Keeps his proud Court, and ne’re is seen.

Oh take my heart, and by that means you'll
prove

Within too stor'd enough of Love :
Give me but Yours, I'll by that change so
thrive,

That Love in all my parts shall live.
So powerful is this change, it render can
My outside Woman, and your inside Man.

The Wish

1

Well then ; I now do plainly see,
This busie world and I shall ne're agree ;
The very Honey of all earthly joy
Does of all meats the soonest cloy,
And they (methinks) deserve my pity,
Who for it can endure the stings,
The Crowd, and Buz, and Murmurings
Of this great Hive, the City.

2

Ah, yet, E're I descend to th' Grave
May I a small House, and large Garden have !
And a few Friends, and many Books, both true,
Both wise, and both delightful too !
And since Love ne're will from me flee,
A Mistress moderately fair,
And good as Guardian-Angels are,
Only belov'd, and loving me !

3

Oh, Fountains, when in you shall I
My self, eas'd of unpeaceful thoughts, espy ?
Oh Fields ! Oh Woods ! when, when shall I be
made
The happy Tenant of your shade ?
Here's the Spring-head of Pleasures flood ;
Where all the Riches lie, that she,
Has coyn'd and stamp't for good.

4

Pride and Ambition here,
 Only in far-fetcht Metaphors appear ;
 Here nought but winds can hurtful Murmurs
 scatter,

And nought but Echo flatter.

The Gods, when they descended, hither
 From Heav'd did alwayes chuse their way ;
 And therefore we may boldly say,
 That 'tis the way too thither.

5

How happy here should I,
 And one dear She live, and embracing die ?
 She who is all the world, and can exclude
 In desarts Solitude.

I should have then this only fear,
 Lest men, when they my pleasures see,
 Should hither throng to live like me,
 And so make a City here.

All-over Love

I

Tis well, 'tis well with them (say I)
Whose short-liv'd Passions with themselves
can die :

For none can be unhappy, who
'Midst all his ills a time does know
(Though ne're so long) when he shall not be so.

2

Whatever parts of Me remain,
Those parts will still the Love of thee retain ;
For 'twas not only in my Heart,
But like a God by pow'rfull Art,
'Twas all in all, and all in every Part.

3

My 'Affection no more perish can
Than the First Matter that compounds a Man.
Hereafter if one Dust of Me
Mixt with anothers substance be,
'Twill Leven that whole Lump with Love of
Thee.

4

Let Nature if she please disperse
My Atoms over all the Universe,
At the last they easi'ly shall,
Themselves know, and together call,
For thy Love, like a Mark, is stamped on all.

The Heart Fled Again

1

False, foolish Heart ! didst thou not say,
That thou wouldst never leave me more ?
Behold again 'tis fled away,
Fled as far from me as before.
I strove to bring it back again,
I cry'd and hollow'd after it in vain.

2

Even so the gentle Tyrian Dame,
When neither Grief nor Love prevail,
Saw the dear object of her flame,
Th'ingrateful Trojan hoist his Sail :
Aloud she call'd to him to stay ;
The wind bore him, and her lost words away.

3

The doleful Ariadne so,
On the wide shore forsaken stood :
False Theseus, whither dost thou go ?
Afar false Theseus cut the flood.
But Bacchus came to her relief ;
Bacchus himself's too weak to ease my grief.

4

Ah senseless Heart, to take no rest,
But travel thus eternally !
Thus to be froz'n in every breast !
And to be scorcht in every Eye !
Wandering about like wretched Cain,
Thrust out, ill-us'd by all, but by none slain !

5

Well ; since thou wilt not here remain,
I'll ev'en to live without Thee try ;
My Head shall take the greater pain,
And all thy duties shall supply ;
I can more easi'ly live I know
Without Thee, than without a Mistress Thou.

My Picture

1

Here, take my Likeness with you, whilst 'tis so ;
For when from hence you go,
The next Suns rising will behold
Me pale, and lean, and old.
The Man who did this Picture draw,
Will swear next day my face he never saw.

2

I really believe, within a while,
If you upon this shadow smile,
Your presence will such vigour give,
(Your presence which makes all things
live)
And absence so much alter Me,
This will the Substance, I the shadow be.

3

When from your well-wrought Cabinet you
take it,
And your bright looks awake it ;
Ah be not frightened, if you see
The new-soul'd Picture gaze on Thee,
And hear it breath a sigh or two ;
For those are the first things that it will do.

4

My Rival-Image will be then thought blest,
And laugh at me as dispossess ;
But Thou, who (if I know thee right)
I'th' substance dost not much delight,
Wilt rather send again for Me,
Who then shall but my Pictures Picture be.

Impossibilities

1

Impossibilities ? oh no, there's none ;
Could mine bring thy Heart Captive home ;
As easi'ly other dangers were o'rethrown,
As Cæsar after vanquisht Rome,
His little Asian foes did overcome.

2

True Lovers oft by Fortune are envy'd,
Oft Earth and Hell against them strive ;
But Providence engages on their side,
And a good end at last does give ;
At last Just Men and Lovers always thrive.

3

As Stars (not powerful else) when they conjoyn,
Change, as they please, the Worlds estate ;
So thy Heart in Conjunction with mine,
Shall our own fortunes regulate ;
And to our Stars themselves prescribe a Fate.

4

'Twould grieve me much to find some bold
Romance,
That should too kind examples shew,
Which before us in wonders did advance ;
Not that I thought that story true,
But none should Fancy more, than I would Do.

5
Through spight of our worst Enemies, thy
Friends,

Through Local Banishment from Thee ;
Through the loud thoughts of less-concerning
Ends,

As easie shall my passage be,
As was the Am'orous Youth's o're Helles Sea.

6

In vain the Winds, in vain the Billows roar ;
In vain the Stars their aid deny'd :
He saw the Sestian Tower on th'other shore ;
Shall th' Hellespont our Loves divide ?
No, not th' Atlantick Oceans boundless Tide.

7

Such Seas betwixt us eas'ly conquer'd are ;
But, gentle Maid, do not deny
To let thy beams shine on me from afar ;
And still the Taper let me 'espy :
For when thy Light goes out, I sink and die.

FROM “PINDARIQUE ODES”

The Muse

I

Go, the rich Chariot instantly prepare ;
The Queen, my Muse, will take the air ;
Unruly Phansie with strong Judgment trace,
Put in nimble-footed Wit,
Smooth-pac’d Eloquence joyn with it,
Sound Memory with young Invention place,
Harness all the winged race.
Let the Postillion Nature mount, and let
The Coachman Art be set.
And let the airy Footmen running all beside,
Make a long row of goodly pride.
Figures, Concepts, Raptures, and Sentences
In a well-worded dress.
And innocent Loves, and pleasant Truths, and
useful Lies,
In all their gaudy Liveries.
Mount, glorious Queen, thy travelling
Throne,
And bid it to put on ;
For long, though cheerful, is the way,
And Life, alas, allows but one ill winters Day.

2

Where never Foot of Man, or Hoof of Beast
The passage prest,
Where never Fish did fly,
And with short silver wings cut the low liquid
Sky.

Where Bird with painted Oars did ne're
Row through the trackless Ocean of the Air.

Where never yet did pry
The busie mornings curious Ey :
The Wheels of thy bold Coach pass quick and
free ;

And all's an open Road to Thee.

Whatever God did Say,
Is all thy plain and smooth, uninterrupted way.
Nay, ev'n beyond his works thy Voyages are
known,

Thou 'hast thousand worlds too of thine
own.

Thou speak'st, great Queen, in the same style
as He,

And a New World leaps forth when Thou
say'st, Let it be.

3

Thou fathom'st the deep Gulf of Ages past,
And canst pluck up with ease
The years which Thou dost please,
Like shipwrackt Treasures by rude Tempests
cast

Long since into the Sea,
Brought up again to light and publique Use by
Thee.

Nor do'st thou only Dive so low,
But Fly
With an unwearied Wing the other way on
high,
Where Fates among the Stars do grow ;
There into the close Nests of Time do'st peep,
And there with piercing Eye,

Through the firm shell, and the thick White
do'st spie,
Years to come a forming lie
Close in their sacred Secondine asleep,
Till hatcht by the Suns vital heat,
Which o're them yet does brooding set,
They Life and Motion get,
And ripe at last with vigorous might
Break through the Shell and take their ever-
lasting Flight.

4

And sure we may
The same too of the Present say,
If Past, and Future Times do thee obey.
Thou stop'st this Current, and dost make
This running River settle like a Lake,
Thy certain hand holds fast the slippery Snake.
The fruit which does so quickly wast,
Men scarce can see it, much less tast,
Thou Comfitest in Sweets to make it last.
This shining piece of Ice
Which melts so soon away
With the Suns ray,
Thy Verse does solidate and Crystallize,
Till it a lasting Mirror be.
Nay thy Immortal Rhyme
Makes this one short Point of Time,
To fill up half the Orb of Round Eternitie.

Life

NASCENTES MORIMUR. MANILIUS

I

We're ill by these Grammarians us'd,
We are abus'd by Words, grosly abus'd ;
 From the Maternal Tomb,
 To the Graves fruitful Womb,
We call here Life ; but Life's a name
 That nothing here can truly claim :
This wretched Inn, where we scarce stay to
 bait,
 We call our Dwelling-place ;
 We call one Step a Race :
But Angels in their full enlightened state,
Angels who Live, and know what 'tis to Be,
Who all the nonsense of our Language see,
Who speak Things, and our Words, their ill-
 drawn Picture scorn,
 When we by'a foolish Figure say,
 Behold an old Man dead ! then they
Speak properly, and cry, Behold a man-child
 born.

2

My Eyes are opened, and I see
Through the Transparent Fallacie :
 Because we seem wisely to talk
Like men of business ; and for business walk
 From place to place,
And mighty voyages we take,
 And mighty journeys seem to make,
O're Sea and Land, the little Point that has no
 space.

Because we fight, and Battels gain ;
Some Captives call, and say, the rest are slain.
Because we heap up yellow Earth, and so,
Rich, valiant, wise, and vertuous seem to
grow ;
Because we draw a long Nobilitie
From Hieroglyphick proofs of Heraldrie,
And impudently talk of a Posteritie ;
And, like Egyptian Chroniclers,
Who write of twenty thousand years,
With Maravedies make th' account,
That single Time might to a sum amount,
We grow at last by Custom to believe,
That really we Live :
Whilst all these Shadows that for things we
take,
Are but the empty dreams which in Deaths
sleep we make.

3

But these fantastique errors of our Dream,
Lead us to solid wrong ;
We pray God, our Friends torments to prolong,
And wish uncharitably for them,
To be as long a Dying as Methusalem.
The ripened Soul longs from his Pris'on to
come,
But we would seal, and sew up, if we could, the
Womb.
We seek to close and plaster up by Art
The cracks and breaches of th'extended shell,
And in that narrow Cell
Would rudely force to dwell
The noble vigorous Bird already wing'd to
part.

FROM "DAVIDEIS"

Song

When Israel was from bondage led,
 Led by th' Almighty's hand
 From out a foreign Land
 The great Sea beheld, and fled.

As men pursu'd, when that fear past they find,
Stop on some higher ground to look behind,
 So whilst through wondrous ways
 The sacred Army went,
 The Waves afar stood up to gaze,
 And their own Rocks did represent,
Solid as Waters are above the Firmament.

Old Jordans waters to their spring
 Start back with sudden fright ;
 The spring amaz'd at sight,
 Asks what News from Sea they bring.
The Mountains shook, and to the Mountains
 side,
The little Hills leapt round themselves to hide ;
 As young affrighted Lambs
 When they ought dreadful spy,
 Run trembling to their helpless Dams :
 The mighty Sea and River by,
Were glad for their excuse to see the Hills to
 fly.

What ail'd the mighty Sea to flee ?
 Or why did Jordans Tide
 Back to his Fountain glide ?
 Jordans Tyde, what ailed Thee ?

Why leapt the Hills ? why did the Mountains
shake ?
What ail'd them their fixt Natures to forsake ?
Fly where thou wilt, O Sea !
And Jordans Current cease ;
Jordan there is no need of thee,
For at Gods word, when e're he
please,
The Rocks shall weep new Waters forth
instead of these.

FROM "ESSAYS"

Curst be the Man

I

Curst be the Man (What do I wish ? as though
The wretch already were not so ;
But curst on let him be) who thinks it brave
And great his Country to enslave,
Who seeks to overpoise alone
The Balance of a Nation ;
Against the whole but naked State,
Who in his own light Scale makes up with
Arms the weight.

2

Who of his Nation loves to be the first,
Though at the rate of being worst.
Who would be rather a great Monster, than
A well-proportion'd Man.
The Son of Earth with hundred hands
Upon his three-pil'd Mountain stands,
Till Thunder strikes him from the Skie ;
The Son of Earth again in his Earths womb
does lie.

3

What Blood, Confusion, Ruine, to obtain
A short and miserable Reign ?
In what oblique and humble creeping wise
Does the mischievous Serpent rise ?

But ev'n his forked Tongue strikes dead,
When h'as rear'd up his wicked Head,
He murders with his mortal frown,
A Basilisk he grows if once he get a Crown.

4

But no Guards can oppose assaulting Ears,
Or Undermining Tears.
No more than doors, or close-drawn Curtains
keep
The swarming Dreams out when we sleep.
That bloody Conscience too of his
(For, oh, a Rebel Red-coat 'tis)
Does here his early Hell begin,
He sees his Slaves without, his Tyrant feels
within.

5

Let, Gracious God, let never more thine hand
Lift up this Rod against our Land.
A Tyrant is a Rod and Serpent too,
And brings worse Plagues than Egypt
knew.
What Rivers stain'd with blood have
been ?
What Storm and Hail-shot have we seen ?
What Sores deform'd the Ulcerous State ?
What darkness to be felt has buried us of late ?

6

How has it snatcht our Flocks and Herds
away ?
And made ev'n our Sons a prey ?
What croaking Sects and Vermin has it sent,
The restless Nation to torment ?

What greedy Troops, what armed power
Of Flies and Locusts do devour
The Land which every where they fill ?
Nor fly they, Lord, away ; no, they devour it
still.

7

Come the eleventh Plague, rather than this
should be ;
Come sink us rather in the Sea.
Come rather Pestilence and reap us down ;
Come Gods sword rather than our own.
Let rather Roman come again,
Or Saxon, Norman, or the Dane,
In all the bonds we ever bore,
We griev'd, we sigh'd, we wept ; we never
blusht before.

8

If by our sins the Divine Justice be
Call'd to this last extremitie,
Let some denouncing Jonas first be sent,
To try if England can repent.
Methinks at least some Prodigy,
Some dreadful Comet from on high,
Should terribly forewarn the Earth,
As of good Princes Deaths, so of a Tyrants
Birth.

Ode upon Liberty

I

Freedom with Virtue takes her seat,
Her proper place, her only Scene,
Is in the Golden Mean,
She lives not with the Poor, nor with the Great,
The wings of those Necessity has clipt,
And they'r in Fortunes Bridewel whipt,
To the laborious task of Brcad ;
These are by various Tyrants captive led.
Now wild Ambition with imperious force
Rides, Reins, and Spurs them like th' unruly
Horse.
And servile Avarice yokes them now
Like toilsome Oxen to the Plow.
And sometimes Lust, like the misguided Light,
Draws them through all the Labyrinths of
night.
If any few among the Great there be
From these insulting Passions free,
Yet we ev'n those too fetter'd see
By Custom, Business, Crowds, and formal
Decencie.
And wheresoe'r they stay, and wheresoe'r they
go,
Impertinencies round them flow :
These are the small uneasie things
Which about Greatness still are found,
And rather it Molest than Wound :
Like Gnats which too much heat of Summer
brings ;
But Cares do swarm there too, and those have
stings ;

As when the Honey does too open lie,
A-thousand Wasps about it flie :
Nor will the Master ev'n to share admit ;
The Master stands aloof, and dares not taste
of it.

2

'Tis Morning ; well ; I fain would yet sleep
on ;
You cannot now ; you must be gone
To Court, or to the noisie hall :
Besides, the Rooms are crowded all ;
The stream of Business does begin,
And a Spring-Tide of Clients is come in.
Ah Cruel Guards, which this poor Prisoner
keep !
Will they not suffer him to sleep ?
Make an Escape, out at the Postern fleet,
And get some blessed Hours of Liberty,
With a few Friends, and a few Dishes Dine,
And much of Mirth, and moderate Wine.
To thy bent mind some relaxation give,
And steal one day out of thy life to live.
Oh happy man (he cries) to whom kind Heaven
Has such a Freedom always given !
Why, Mighty Madam, What should hinder
thee
From being every day as free ?

3

In all the freeborn Nations of the Air
Never did Bird a spirit so mean and sordid
bear,
As to exchange a Native Liberty
Of soaring boldly up into the Sky,

His liberty to Sing, to Perch, or Fly,
When, and wherever he thought good,
And all the innocent pleasures of the Wood,
For a more plentiful or constant Food.
Nor ever did ambitious Rage
Make him into a painted Cage,
Or the false Forest of a well-hung Room
For Honour and Preferment come ;
Now, Blessings on you all, ye' Heroick Race,
Who keep their Primitive Powers and Rights
so well,
Though Men and Angels fell.
Of all material Lives the highest place
To you is justly given,
And Ways and Walks the nearest Heaven.
Whilst wretched we, yet vain and proud, think
fit
To boast that we look up to it.
Ev'n to the universal Tyrant Love,
You Homage pay but once a year :
None so degenerous and unbirdly prove,
As his perpetual yoke to bear,
None but a few unhappy Houshold Fowl,
Whom human Lordship does controul ;
Who from the birth corrupted were
By Bondage and by Mans Example here.

He's no small Prince, who every day
Thus to himself can say,
Now will I sleep, now eat, now sit, now walk,
Now meditate alone, now with Acquaintance
talk,

This I will do, here I will stay,
Or if my fancy calleth me away,
My man and I will presently go ride
(For we before have nothing to provide,
Nor after are to render an account)
To Dover, Berwick, or the Cornish Mount.

If thou but a short journey take,
As if thy last thou wert to make,
Business must be dispatch'd e'r thou canst part,
Nor canst thou stir unless there be
A hundred Horse and Men to wait on
thee,
And many a Mule, and many a Cart ;
What an unwieldy Man thou art ?
The Rhodian Colossus so
A Journey too might go.

5

Where Honour, or where Conscience does not
bind
No other Law shall shackle me,
Slave to my self I will not be,
Nor shall my future Actions be confin'd
By my own present Mind.
Who by Resolves and Vows engag'd does
stand
For days that yet belong to Fate,
Does like an unthrift mortgage his Estate,
Before it falls into his Hand.
The Bondman of the Cloister so
All that he does receive does always owe.
And still as Time comes in, it goes away
Not to Enjoy but Debts to pay.
Unhappy Slave, and Pupil to a Bell !

Which his hours work as well as hours does
tell !

Unhappy till the last, the Kind releasing Knell.

6

If Life should a well order'd Poem be
(In which he only hits the white
Who joyns true Profit with the best Delight)
The more Heroick strain let others take,
Mine the Pindaric way I'll make.
The Matter shall be grave, the Numbers loose
and free.

It shall not keep one settled pace of Time,
In the same Tune it shall not always chime,
Nor shall each day just to his neighbour
Rhime,

A thousand Liberties it shall dispense,
And yet shall manage all without offence,
Or to the sweetness of the Sound, or greatness
of the Sence.

Nor shall it never from one Subject start,
Nor seek Transitions to depart,
Nor its set way o'r Stiles and Bridges make,
Nor through Lanes a Compass take,
As if it fear'd some trespass to commit,
When the wide Air's a Road for it.

So the Imperial Eagle does not stay
Till the whole Carcass he devour,
That's fallen into its power.
As if his generous Hunger understood
That he can never want plenty of Food,
He only sucks the tastful Blood,
And to fresh Game flies cheerfully away ;
To Kites and meaner Birds he leaves the
mangled Prey.

*Hail, old Patrician Trees, so great and
good!*

¹

Hail, Old Patrician Trees, so great and good !
Hail ye Plebeian under-wood !
Where the Poetick Birds rejoice,
And for their quiet nests and plenteous Food,
Pay with their grateful voice.

²

Hail, the poor Muses richest Mannor Seat !
Ye Country Houses and Retreat,
Which all the happy Gods so love,
That for you oft they quit their Bright and Great
Metropolis above.

³

Here Nature does a House for me erect,
Nature the wisest Architect,
Who those fond Artists does despise
That can the fair and living Trees neglect ;
Yet the dead Timber prize.

⁴

Here let me careless and unthoughtful lying,
Hear the soft winds above me flying,
With all their wanton Boughs dispute,
And the more tuneful Birds to both replying,
Nor be my self too Mute.

5

A silver stream shall roul his waters near,
Gilt with Sun-beams here and there,
On whose enamel'd Bank I'll walk,
And see how prettily they smile, and hear
How prettily they talk.

6

Ah wretched, and too Solitary He
Who loves not his own Companie !
He'l feel the weight of't many a day,
Unless he call in Sin or Vanitie
To help to bear't away.

7

Oh Solitude, first state of Human-kind !
Which blest remain'd till man did find
Even his own helpers Companie.
As soon as two (Alas !) together joyn'd,
The Serpent made up Three.

8

Though God himself, through Countless Ages
Thee
His sole Companion chose to be,
Thee, Sacred Solitude alone,
Before the branchy Head of Numbers Tree
Sprung from the Trunk of one.

9

Thou (though men think thine an unactive
part)
Dost break and tame th'unruly heart,
Which else would know no settled pace,
Making it move, well manag'd by thy Art,
With Swiftness and with Grace.

Thou the faint beams of Reason's scatter'd
 Light
 Dost like a Burning-glass unite,
 Dost Multiply the feeble Heat,
 And fortifie the strength till thou dost bright
 And noble fires beget.

Whilst this hard Truth I teach, methinks, I see
 The Monster London laugh at me ;
 I should at thee too, foolish City,
 If it were fit to laugh at Misery,
 But thy Estate I pity.

Let but thy wicked Men from out thee go,
 And all the fools that crowd thee so,
 Even thou who dost thy Millions boast,
 A Village less than Islington wilt grow,
 A Solitude almost.

Upon the slippery tops of humane State

Upon the slippery tops of humane State,
 The gilded Pinnacles of Fate,
Let others proudly stand, and for a while
 The giddy danger to beguile,
With Joy and with disdain look down on all,
 Till their Heads turn, and down they fall.
Me, O ye Gods, on Earth, or else so near
 That I no fall to Earth may fear,
And, O ye Gods, at a good distance seat
 From the long Ruins of the Great,
Here wrapt in th' Arms of Quiet let me lye ;
 Quiet, Companion of Obscurity.
Here let my life, with as much silence slide,
 As Time that measures it does glide.
Nor let the Breath of Infamy or Fame,
From Town to Town echo about my Nam
Nor let my homely Death embroidered be
 With Scutcheon or with Elogie.
An old Plebeian let me die,
Alas, all then are such as well as I.
 To him, alas, to him, I fear,
The face of Death will terrible appear,
Who in his life flattering his senceless pride
By being known to all the world beside,
Does not himself, when he is dying know
Nor what he is, nor whither he's to go.

Claudian's Old Man of Verona

Happy the Man who his whole time doth bound

Within th' inclosure of his little ground.

Happy the Man, whom the same humble place,
(Th' hereditary Cottage of his Race)

From his first rising infancy has known,
And by degrees sees gentle bending down,
With natural propensity to that Earth
Which both preserv'd his Life, and gave him Birth.

Him no false distant lights by Fortune set,
Could ever into foolish wandrings get.

He never dangers either saw or fear'd :
The dreadful storms at Sea he never heard.

He never heard the shrill alarms of War,
Or the worse noises of the Lawyers Bar.

No change of Consuls marks to him the year,
The change of seasons is his Calendar.

The Cold and Heat, Winter and Summer shows,

Autumn by Fruits, and Spring by Flow'rs he knows.

He measures Time by Land-marks, and has found

For the whole day the Dial of his ground.

A neighbouring Wood born with himself he sees,

And loves his old contemporary Trees.

H'as only heard of near Verona's Name,
And knows it like the Indies but by Fame.

Does with a like concernment notice take
Of the Red Sea, and of Benacus Lake.
Thus Health and Strength he to 'a third age
enjoys,
And sees a long posterity of Boys.
About the spacious World let others Roam,
The Voyage Life is longest made at home.

Why dost thou heap up Wealth, which thou must quit

¹

Why dost thou heap up Wealth, which thou must quit,

Or, what is worse, be left by it ?

Why dost thou load thy self, when thou'rt to flie,

Oh Man ordain'd to die ?

²

Why dost thou build up stately Rooms on high,

Thou who art under ground to lie ?

Thou sow'st and Plantest, but no Fruit must see

For Death alas ! is sowing Thee.

³

Suppose, thou Fortune could to tameness bring,

And clip or pinion her wing ;

Suppose that could'st on Fate so far prevail
As not to cut off thy Entail :

⁴

Yet Death at all that subtilty will laugh,

Death will that foolish Gard'ner mock,

Who does a slight and annual Plant engraff
Upon a lasting stock.

⁵

Thou dost thy self wise and industrious deem ;
A mighty Husband thou wouldst seem ;

Fond Man ! like a bought slave, thou all the
while
Dost but for others sweat and toil.

6

Officious fool ! that needs must meddling be
In busi'ness that concerns not thee !
For when to future years thou' extend'st thy
cares,
Thou deal'st in other mens affairs.

7

Even aged Men, as if they truly were
Children again, for Age prepare
Provisions for long travail they design,
In the last point of their short Line.

8

Wisely the Ant against poor Winter hoards
The Stock which Summers wealth affords,
In Grashoppers that must at Autumn dye,
How vain were such an industry ?

9

Of Power and Honour the deceitful Light
Might half excuse our cheated fight,
If it of Life the whole small time should stay,
And be our Sunshine all the day.

10

Like Lightning that, begot but in a Cloud
(Though shining bright, and speaking
loud)
Whilst it begins, concludes its violent Race,
And where it Gilds, it wounds the place.

11

Oh Scene of Fortune, which do'st fair appear,
 Only to Men that stand not near !
 Proud Poverty, that Tinsel brav'ry wears !
 And, like a Rainbow, painted Tears !

12

Be prudent, and the shore in prospect keep,
 In a weak Boat trust not the deep.
 Plac'd beneath Envy, above envy'ing rise ;
 Pity Great Men, Great Things despise.

13

The wise example of the Heavenly Lark,
 Thy Fellow-Poet, Cowley mark,
 Above the Clouds let thy proud Musick sound,
 Thy humble Nest build on the Ground.

*Martial, Lib. 5, Epigr. 59. To-morrow
 you will Live*

To morrow you will Live, you always cry ;
 In what far Country does this Morrow lye,
 That 'tis so mighty long e'r it arrive ?
 Beyond the Indies does this Morrow live ?
 'Tis so far fetcht this Morrow, that I fear
 'Twill be both very Old and very Dear.
 To morrow I will live, the Fool does say ;
 To Day it self's too late, the Wise liv'd
 Yesterday.

This only grant me, that my means may lye

This only grant me, that my means may lye
Too low for Envy, for contempt too high.

Some Honour I would have

Not from great deeds, but good alone.

Th' unknown are better than ill known.

Rumour can ope' the Grave.

Acquaintance I would have, but when't
depends

Not on the Number, but the Choice of Friends.

Books should, not business, entertain the Light,
And sleep, as undisturb'd as Death, the Night.

My House a Cottage, more

Than Palace, and should fitting be

For all my Use, no Luxurie.

My Garden painted o'r

With Natures hand, not Arts ; and Pleasures
yield,

Horace might envy in his Sabine field.

Thus would I double my Life's fading space,
For he that runs it well, twice runs his race.

And in this true delight,

These unbought sports, that happy State,

I would not fear nor wish my fate,

But boldly say each night,

To morrow let my Sun his beams display,

Or in clouds hide them ; I have liv'd to Day.

FROM "PIRAMUS AND THISBE"

Song

Come, Love, why stayest thou ? the Night
Will vanish e'er we taste Delight :
The Moon obscures her self from Sight,
Thou absent, whose Eyes gave her Light.

Come quickly, Dear, be brief as Time,
Or we by Morn shall be o'erta'en,
Love's Joy's thine own, as well as mine,
Spend not therefore thy Time in vain.

Epitaph

Underneath this Marble Stone,
Lie two Beauties join'd in one.

Two whose Loves Death could not sever,
For both liv'd, both dy'd together.

Two whose Souls, b'ing too Divine
For Earth, in their own Sphere now shine.

Who have left their Loves to Fame,
And their Earth to Earth again.

FROM "SYLVA"

On the Praise of Poetry

'Tis not a Pyramid of Marble-stone,
 Tho' high as our Ambition ;
'Tis not a Tomb cut out in Brass, which can
 Give Life to th' Ashes of a Man,
But Verses only they shall fresh appear,
 Whilst there are Men to read or hear,
When Time shall make the lasting Brass decay,
 And eat the Pyramid away.
Turning that Monument wherein Men trust
 Their Names, to what it keeps, poor
 Dust :
Then shall the Epitaph remain, and be
 New graven in Eternity.
Poets by Death are conquer'd, but the Wit
 Of Poets triumph over it.
What cannot Verse ? When Thracian Orpheus
 took
 His Lyre, and gently on it strook,
The learned Stones came Dancing all along,
 And kept Time to the charming Song.
With artificial Pace the Warlike Pine,
 The Elm, and his Wife th' Ivy-twine,
With all the better Trees, which erst had stood
 Unmov'd, forsook their native Wood.
The Laurel to the Poet's Hand did bow,
 Craving the Honour of his Brow :
And every loving Arm embrac'd, and made
 With their officious Leaves a Shade.
The Beasts too strove his Auditors to be,
 Forgetting their old Tyranny.

The fearful Hart next to the Lion came,
And Wolf was Shepherd to the Lamb.
Nightingales, harmless Syrens of the Air,
And Muses of the Place, were there.
Who when their little Wind-pipes they had
found
Unequal to so strange a Sound,
O'ercome by Art and Grief they did expire,
And fell upon the conqu'ring Lyre.
Happy, O happy they, whose Tomb might be,
Mausolus, envied by Thee !

*That a Pleasant Poverty is to be prefer'd
before Discontented Riches*

Why, O, doth gaudy Tagus ravish thee,
Tho' Neptune's Treasure-house it be ?
Why doth Pactolus thee bewitch,
Infected yet with Midas glorious Itch ?

Their dull and sleepy Streams are not at all
Like other Floods Poetical ;
They have no Dance, no wanton Sport,
No gentle Murmur, the lov'd Shoar to court.

No Fish inhabit the adulterate Flood,
Nor can it feed the neighb'ring Wood,
No Flower or Herb is near it found,
But a perpetual Winter starves the Ground.

Give me a River which doth scorn to shew
An added Beauty, whose clear Brow
May be my Looking-glass to see
What my Face is, and what my Mind should be.

Here Waves call Waves, and glide along in
Rank,
And prattle to the smiling Bank :
Here sad King-fishers tell their Tales,
And Fish enrich the Brook with Silver Scales.

Daisies, the First-born of the teeming Spring,
On each Side their Embroidery bring,
Here Lilies wash, and grow more white,
And Daffadils to see themselves delight.

Here a fresh Arbour gives her am'rous Shade,
Which Nature, the best Gard'ner made,
Here I would sit and sing rude Lays,
Such as the Nymphs, and Me my self would
please.

Thus would I waste, thus end my careless Days,
And Robin-red-breasts, whom Men
praise
For pious Birds, should when I die,
Make both my Monument and Elegy.

To his Mistress

Tyrian Dye, why do you wear,
 You whose Cheeks best Scarlet are ?
 Why do you so fondly pin
 Pure Linen o'er your Skin,
 (Your Skin that's whiter far)
Casting a dusky Cloud before a Star ?

Why bears your Neck a golden Chain ?
Did Nature make your Hair in vain ?
 Of Gold most pure and fine.
 With Gems why do you shine ?
 They, Neighbours to your Eyes
Shew but like Phosphor, when the Sun doth
 rise.

I would have all my Mistress's Parts
Owe more to Nature than to Arts,
 I would not woo the Dress,
 Or one whose Nights give less
 Contentment than the Day.
She's Fair, whose Beauty only makes her Gay.

For 'tis not Buildings make a Court,
Or Pomp, but 'tis the King's Resort :
 If Jupiter down pour
 Himself, and in a Shower
 Hide such bright Majesty,
Less than a Golden One it cannot be.

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